

Free School Meals – Key Information

Please help Ealing families by sharing this information as widely as possible

During the COVID-19 situation, throughout lockdown and through the summer holidays this year, the government has put in place measures to ensure children eligible for free school meals continue to receive them. They have also extended the eligibility criteria to include families with NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds) status.

Parents who have recently started to claim benefits may also be eligible to claim free school meals for their children. Eligible benefits are:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if you applied on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get)

To find out more and access the full eligibility criteria visit www.ealingfamiliesdirectory.org.uk and search 'free school meals'.

How it works

Schools have been given the choice by the government on how they offer the free school meals. They can choose to send a voucher code to families which can be exchanged for a supermarket gift card and used to buy groceries, or they can provide food parcels for families or meals on site at the school.

Eligibility for free school meals is linked to benefits so if families have recently started claiming benefits as a result of changes to their circumstances, their child(ren) may now be entitled to free school meals.

If the child's school has opted for the vouchers, they will send an eCode to the family – this is a 16-digit code which will be sent by email. Using this code, families will then need to visit www.freeschoolmeals.co.uk and choose their supermarket eGift card (voucher). Please note: eCodes cannot be used directly with the supermarket and must be exchanged for an eGift card (voucher).

Families who do not have internet access will receive the eCode from their school, printed and posted to them.

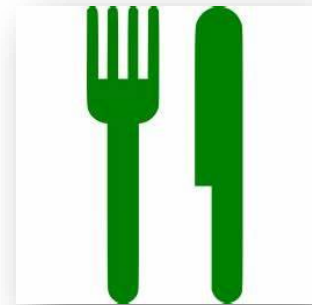
Once families have obtained their eGift card, it can be used at any of the following supermarkets to buy groceries only:

Aldi, Asda, Morrisons, M&S food, Sainsburys, Tesco and Waitrose

Supporting families to access the free school meals

Many families are unaware of the free school meals offer during lockdown and the changes to eligibility criteria. If you work with families, you're in the perfect position to ensure you ask the question about whether or not families are continuing to receive this support (if they were getting it prior to lockdown), or if they've recently started claiming benefits and need to check their eligibility.

Eligibility checks can be made at <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals> Please support families to conduct this check.



If a family is eligible, they should get in touch with their child's school to begin accessing the free school meals.

Who to contact if there is a problem

If you come across parents having trouble accessing the scheme or difficulty using the vouchers, please ask them to get in touch with their child's school in the first instance. If the school is unable to help, they can get in touch with Ealing's Pupil Support Service at pupilsupport@ealing.gov.uk or by phone on **020 8825 5566**.

If you or any of the families you work with would like to get more information, you can contact Ealing's Family Information Service on **020 8825 5588** (Mon-Fri, 9am to 5pm).

Other sources of help for families who need food

Ealing Together is a collaboration between Ealing Council and the community and is involved in the distribution of food to those in need. For advice and to access food deliveries please use the contact form at <https://ealingtogether.org/help-for-residents/> or call 020 8825 7170.

Ealing Food Bank can also support with food parcels and deliveries. For more information visit <https://ealing.foodbank.org.uk/get-help/how-to-get-help/>

There are a few other food distribution services currently operating and these are listed on www.ealingfamiliesdirectory.org.uk from a link on the home page of the site.